Assassination Probers Ask $6.5 Million

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The House Select Committee on Assassinations today approved a budget of $6.5 million for the first year of its investigation of the murders of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

The figure presented by Richard A. Sprague, chief counsel and director of the investigation, was more than twice as much as had been expected.

Sprague told the committee, before leaving to make an appearance before the House Democratic Caucus, that he needs a staff of 170 people to do a thorough and credible job.

"This is a bare-bones staff," Sprague declared. "I don't think the job can be done with any cut. I'd rather the House said we're not going to do it than to play games with this investigation. Anything less will make the task impossible."

SPRAGUE WAS to present the initial findings of the task force to the Select Committee later today, but indicated the main portion of these findings is already well known. The more substantial findings and any new facts will be given to the committee in executive session.

The investigative staff is operating on a standby appropriation of $150,000. Chairman Thomas N. Downing, D-Va., said he hopes for speedy action by the House Appropriations Committee on the budget approved today so that the committe investigators can proceed for their first year of work.

"I have proceded on the premise that the staff must be totally independent," Sprague testified.

"Congress cannot ask that the executive branches of the government be assigned to the investigations. It would be easier on the budget to use the CIA, the FBI, and the Secret Service, but if Congress tries to save money this way it would be flying against all of the reasons for the House investigation. Any attempt to do this would make Congress appear foolish."

Sprague cited the CIA plots against Fidel Castro and the destruction of an FBI document about Lee Harvey Oswald as examples of information that was not available to the Warren Commission in its 10 months of existence.

Sprague said he intends to carry on the investigations of the assasinations of Kennedy and King simultaneously, using two separate task forces.

SPRAGUE WAS critical of the FBI's investigation of Kennedy's death, saying his investigators had found that the previous effort was not as thorough as it ought to have been.

Sprague acknowledged the cost of the investigation is high, but he pointed out that the FBI spent over $2 million in the first three months of the Patricia Hearst case.

He said the Warren Commission had 87 staffers, 150 full-time FBI agents, 60 Secret Service agents, and 13 CIA officials, plus supporting staff. He said the committee's task is more complicated because "we have to find out what was not presented to the Warren Commission and we also have to be able to disprove some things while proving others."

Sprague disclosed that he intends to use polygraph and stress evaluator units (for lie detection) as investigative tools.